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# Sexual Assault: Not in My Navy

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By Vice Adm. Matthew L. Nathan, U.S. Navy surgeon general and chief, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery



Many of you are familiar with my philosophy of “Ship, Shipmate and Self.” In the Navy and Marine Corps, we ensure the mission is accomplished, we watch out for our comrades and we must take care of ourselves. When it comes to preventing and stopping sexual assault, the same applies. Sexual assault strikes at the dignity, health, and welfare of our people, it erodes trust and cohesion, and it undermines the readiness of our force. Together, we must combat sexual assault crimes.

April marks Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month. During this month, Navy Medicine will focus its efforts on awareness and

prevention of sexual violence through command-level education and special events. Sexual assault prevention is a priority year-round, but this month I want talk to stress what Navy Medicine is doing to tackle this issue and how we must come together to prevent sexual assault every day of the year.

While we work to eliminate this crime from our service, we will continue to care for the victims when these unfortunate incidents do occur. It is crucial we support the sexual assault victim and hold offenders accountable. When a victim tells us that they have been sexually assaulted, we believe them and protect their privacy. We must create safe environments free from sexual assault and harassment.

Navy Medicine is committed to the quality of care we provide to victims. We’re increasing the capability to provide timely, readily accessible medical-forensic examinations (Sexual Assault Forensic Examination – SAFE). Last month, we made revisions to Navy Medicine policy establishing training requirements for health care providers to conduct SAFE examinations. Standardized SAFE increases capability and improves the patient experience. Standardization also allows for consistent evidence collection and reporting whether it is at one of our military treatment facilities at home or in a forward-deployed operational area.

Recent sexual assault prevention and response program changes have also resulted in increased access for patients and improved readiness for our Navy Medicine providers. Specifically, as a result of the recent SAFE policy update, our Regional Commanders are ensuring the availability of sexual assault medical response capability 24 hours a day, seven

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days a week for all our service members. Navy Medicine Regional Commanders are also in the process of appointing a Regional Sexual Assault Program Manager to ensure that the Department of Defense standard of care of sexual assault victims is met at the local medical command level.

Awareness and support of those affected by sexual assault is critical, but prevention is vital. We are leaders at every level, and I expect you to exert compassionate and intrusive leadership to stamp out anything that fosters a condition where sexual assaults could occur. Look into any trends or occurrences of sexual assault, unwanted behavior, or on-duty or off-duty atmosphere where trouble can arise. We also need to pay attention to the use and prevent the abuse of alcohol. In many case, alcohol is a contributing factor in sexual assaults.

Every command has access to a [sexual assault response coordinator](#) for witnesses and/or victims to report issues. Don't be that person shaking their head after the fact saying "I saw this coming and I didn't do enough to prevent it."

I take this issue very seriously, and I expect you to do the same. We will be a stronger military, a stronger Navy and a stronger Navy Medicine enterprise as we stand together to combat sexual assault crimes.

Somewhere out there is a young man or woman who is considering either joining, or staying in our Navy. As they consider the pros and cons for themselves, one of them must never ever be fear of sexual assault or inappropriate sexual behavior. Not in my Navy! Not in our Navy!

I am so very proud of the work you do each day. Let's lead together to a Navy that sets the example in honor, courage, and commitment. Thank you for your service and as always, it is my honor and privilege to serve as your surgeon general.

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